Obesity Threatens Life Expectancy Gains

COULD CUT 5 YEARS FROM AMERICAN LIFE SPANS


“All predictions are subject to some doubt, but our estimates indicate that in the near future, obesity will decrease life spans by 4 to 9 months,” says UAB Professor of Biostatistics David B. Allison, PhD, coauthor of the New England Journal report. “In the slightly more distant future — if nothing radically changes — this decline may shave off years of life span.”

Although an accompanying editorial calls the predictions “excessively gloomy,” Dr. Allison notes their estimates were conservative, based on the assumption that in the future, obesity levels and obesity-related deaths would remain static.

The paper’s lead author, University of Illinois demographer S. Jay Olshansky, PhD, began considering American life expectancy in light of Social Security Administration (SSA) projections that life spans would continue to increase, reaching about 85 years by midcentury. SSA bases its projections on historical data, while Dr. Olshansky’s team evaluated current trends in health and mortality.

Dr. Olshansky called on Dr. Allison’s group to help factor obesity into the longevity equation by providing data on the relationships among obesity, mortality rate, and life span. An earlier paper by Dr. Allison et al estimated that in some cases, even moderate obesity can result in up to 5 years of life lost (JAMA. 2003;289:187-193).

Dr. David Allison

KEY FACTOR

Obesity has increased 100% since 1980, Dr. Allison says, noting that minorities and children have experienced the most dramatic increases. “Childhood obesity has doubled in the last 25 years, and many obese children will become obese adults. As they age, today’s 10-year-olds will experience higher rates of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer than their contemporary counterparts.”

The New England Journal report notes, “...in the absence of successful interventions, it seems likely that (the largest negative impact due to obesity) will be in the first half of this century, when at-risk populations reach the greatest ages of vulnerability.”

“The high economic cost and rising number of deaths due to obesity have been reported before. This study is yet another indicator of the profound nature of the problem and will hopefully serve to vitalize society, underscoring the
need for interventions that successfully prevent or treat obesity,” Dr. Allison says. “Our estimates are based on the assumption that nothing will change; we hope society proves us wrong.”

DOM CHAIR CANDIDATE PRESENTATIONS

The UAB community is invited to attend upcoming presentations from candidates for the Department of Medicine chair.

David G. Harrison, MD, Bernard Marcus Professor of Medicine and director of cardiology at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, will speak on Tuesday, June 7, at noon in West Pavilion E. Galen B. Toews, MD, professor of internal medicine and chief of the Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine at the University of Michigan Medical School in Ann Arbor, will present on Thursday, June 16, from 9 AM to 10 AM in West Pavilion E.

Ritchie Joins Geriatric Medicine

Richard M. Allman, MD, professor and director of the UAB Center for Aging and the Birmingham/Atlanta Geriatric Research, Education, and Clinical Center (GRECC), announces the appointment of Christine S. Ritchie, MD, MSPH, as associate professor and director of the Center for Palliative Care and GRECC investigator.

Dr. Ritchie joins UAB from the University of Louisville in Kentucky where she served in numerous positions, including associate chief of staff for the Louisville Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center’s Geriatrics and Extended Care Service; assistant director of clinical research, epidemiology, and statistics training; and medical director of the VA Hospice and Palliative Care Program.

Dr. Ritchie graduated from Davidson College in North Carolina and completed her MD degree at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She completed an internal medicine residency at the School of Medicine at UAB, serving as chief resident. Following a geriatric medicine fellowship at UAB, Dr. Ritchie joined UAB’s Department of Medicine, serving as coordinator for geriatric education and medical director of the VA Hospital-based Home Care Program and the VA Geriatric Assessment Clinic.

After obtaining a MSPH degree from UAB, she completed Harvard University’s School of Public Health Clinical Effectiveness Program and served as adjunct assistant professor at Boston University School of Medicine.

Among her honors and awards, Dr. Ritchie was the recipient of the 1991 Aesculapian Award for Excellence in the Practice of Clinical Medicine, the 1998 UAB Faculty Development Award, the 2003 Provost’s Exemplary Advising Award at the University of Louisville, and the 2005 National VA Mark Wolcott Award for Excellence in Clinical Care Delivery. In 2001, she was inducted into Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society.

She is a diplomate of the National Board of Medical Examiners and the American Board of Internal Medicine, with additional board certification in geriatric medicine, hospice, and palliative medicine.

Dr. Ritchie serves on the editorial board of the Journal of Evidence-based Dental Practice and is a reviewer for numerous other journals.

Her clinical interests center on advanced and complex illness care, and her current research focuses on nutrition and systems of care for patients with advanced illness.

She sees patients in the VA Home-based Palliative Care Program and serves as a consultant in palliative medicine at UAB and the VA. Dr. Ritchie can be reached at 975-8197 for academic and administrative calls: e-mail critchie@uab.edu.

ACCOLADES

LIANG NAMED 2005 KELMAN SCHOLAR

Lina Liang, MD, PhD, a postdoctoral fellow in UAB’s Department of Ophthalmology, has been honored with the 2005 Charles D. Kelman, MD, Postdoctoral Scholar Award for her project, Exploring RPE as Stem Cells of Photoreceptors: Assessing Cellular Differentiation in vivo. Dr. Liang received her training in ophthalmology and vision research from the prestigious Chinese Academy of Transitional Chinese Medicine in Beijing and came to UAB in July 2004. Her studies will be conducted in the lab of Shu-Zhen Wang, PhD, associate professor in the Department of Ophthalmology.

The Charles D. Kelman, MD, Postdoctoral Scholar Award was established by the International Retinal Research Foundation to provide $35,000 annually in salary and research support for a postdoctoral scholar nearing the end of training. By the end of such support, Kelman Scholars are expected to have gained the necessary expertise to engage in productive eye research related to the retina or macula and successfully compete for extramural funding.
and integral to the care delivery process,” Michael Waldrum, MD, hospital chief operating officer, adds. “UAB has a world-class lab. The hard work, professionalism, and dedication of the laboratory staff are outstanding.”

Here are some examples of what goes on 24/7 at UH laboratories:

1 AM: medical technologist (MT) in the chemistry lab runs STAT cardiac enzymes for a patient with chest pain.

2 AM: MT in hematology performs a differential cell count on cerebral spinal fluid to evaluate a patient for meningitis.

3 AM: medical laboratory technician in microbiology streaks a culture plate with a sample from a patient with suspected blastomycosis.

4 AM: MT in coagulation checks the result of a prothrombin time (PT) for a patient on warfarin who arrived in the Emergency Department (ED) with an intracranial bleed.

5 AM: MT in parasitology reviews a blood smear of another ED patient with a history of working out of the country and suspected malarial infection.

6 AM: MT in the CICU laboratory performs STAT PT and partial thromboplastin time in a patient in recovery with postoperative bleeding.

7 AM: MTs from the Office of Bedside Testing review arterial blood gas results processed on an I-Stat in the CVOR before transmitting them to PIN.

8 AM: pathology assistants prepare for a clinicopathologic correlation conference in the autopsy suite.

9 AM: medical laboratory professional in the Cytogenetics Department studies chromosomes in amniotic fluid collected from a high-risk pregnant patient.

10 AM: apheresis specialist performs photopheresis to treat a patient with graft-versus-host disease status post-stem cell transplant.

11 AM: MT reviews bone marrow aspirates to identify leukemic cells in a patient who presented with profound anemia and excessive bleeding.

Noon: cytotechnologists screen Pap smears for cells suspicious for cervical cancer.

1 PM: MT in toxicology performs a valproic acid drug level on a patient with seizures.

2 PM: MT in the immunocytopenia laboratory reports that a patient’s ELISA test proves negative for heparin-induced thrombocytopenia.

3 PM: in the flow cytometry lab, a MT performs a comprehensive rapid analysis of immunomarkers in the blood of an advanced lymphoma patient.

4 PM: in the immunohistochemistry laboratory, technologists stain a breast cancer specimen to help determine the patient’s prognosis.

5 PM: in The Kirklin Clinic® laboratory, several MTs rapidly process blood samples from specialty clinics.

6 PM: histotechnologists prepare and stain hundreds of slides from patients who had biopsies to detect the presence of cancer.

7 PM: MT in molecular diagnostics pipettes samples from an immunocompromised patient as part of PCR testing for Epstein Barr and Parvovirus.

8 PM: MT in the histocompatibility laboratory types a donor sample prior to heart transplantation.

9 PM: medical laboratory professionals in the outreach laboratory and specimen receiving unit prepare laboratory draws from multiple units in the hospital and outside clinics.

10 PM: in the ED lab, a MT focuses on a trauma patient’s blood smear to ensure the correct platelet count is reported.

11 PM: MT in immunology uses immunofluorescence to detect antineu-
Maternity Entrance Opens

CONVENIENT HOSPITAL “FRONT DOOR”

For moms-to-be, there is an important new address: Sixth Avenue South between 19th and 20th streets. The completely renovated unit opened April 27 and gives obstetric patients a convenient new University Hospital “front door.” It also affords expectant mothers the opportunity to bypass potential delays through the hospital’s Fifth Avenue Emergency Department.

The new Maternity Evaluation Unit is a convenient drop-off and first-stop location for patients pregnant 16 weeks or more or those referred directly by their physician. Patients with pregnancy-related complications or illnesses or those who may be in labor should use the new entrance.

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Direct inquiries to:
Medical Publications
JNWB 410A
1530 3RD AVE S
Birmingham AL 35294-0500
(205) 934-2283
E-mail address: jlinn@uabmc.edu

Editor
Julius Linn, MD
Managing Editor
Irene Dortch
Contributors
Mary Collins, Emily Dibbel, Gloria Fanning, Leathia Gray, Lisa Mahaffey, Tracy Bischoff
Photographer
Jeff Tombrello
Special Advisor
Durwood Bradley, MD
Hospital Chief of Staff
Scott E. Buchalter, MD
Assistant Chiefs of Staff
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UAB Newborn Intensive Care Unit “graduates” cut the ribbon opening University Hospital’s Maternity Evaluation Unit.

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